



- **Develop policies and plans to ensure that all students have academically meaningful, sequential, and sustained service-learning experiences throughout their schooling.**

EXPECTATIONS FOR WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW and be able to do guide the course for instruction and accountability within each school and district. As the school community—students, families, educators, and the general community—works with its local school board to set learning goals and objectives for students, service-learning must be considered a primary strategy for linking schools and the community. Local board members and school administrators must take steps to encourage the use of service-learning in their schools.

Establish a School Board Policy on Service-Learning

Local school boards should examine the research on service-learning and incorporate this strategy

into their district’s policies. Each district must determine the policy that best supports its goals for its students. Some local California school boards have established policies designating that a particular number of hours of community work, which may or may not be tied to classroom curriculum, be performed by students each year or as a graduation requirement. Other school boards have clearly indicated that students must be offered service-learning opportunities that integrate meaningful service with the curriculum.

The California School Boards Association (CSBA) (1997, 8) recognizes the importance of service-learning in its *Policy Platform, 1997-98*, which states that the “educational program must respond to student needs, be well articulated and aligned across grade levels, and prepare students for

graduation, employment and/or postsecondary education. Therefore CSBA supports integrated community service activities/service-learning with the curriculum so as to enhance learning in all subject areas.” The association provides sample policy language about service-learning to California school boards.

California School Boards Association Excerpt from Sample Board Policy

Instruction **BP 6142.4(a)**

Learning Through Community Service

The Governing Board recognizes that community service can help students develop skills, career awareness, and self-esteem. Service experiences also can motivate students by letting them apply what they are studying to local needs and problems and by showing them that they can make a contribution to their community.

Integrated Community Service

The Board supports the integration of community service activities with the curriculum so as to enhance learning in all subject areas. The Board encourages staff to collaborate with local public and nonprofit agencies in order to develop service-learning activities that meet the educational objectives and also fit in with current community efforts to meet human, educational, environmental, or public safety needs.

Include Service-Learning in the Local Improvement Plan

In 1994 Congress reauthorized the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), which provides federal funding for multiple purposes, including helping disadvantaged children meet high standards and creating safe and drug-free schools and communities. Almost every California school district receives IASA money, and service-learning is cited throughout the IASA.

The IASA requires every district that accepts funding to develop a Local Improvement Plan. As those plans are developed or revised, the school community should consider service-learning as a strategic component that clearly addresses the requirement for strong community partnerships. In addition to connecting students and the schools to the community, service-learning may also engage community members who do not have children in the school system and give them a role in educating the community’s youth.

Link Service-Learning to Other Districtwide and School Plans

School districts and schools create master plans that integrate different federal and state programs to ensure the students’ success and the most effective use of funding. Many of these programs, such as School-to-Career, Gifted and Talented Education, the Environmental Education Grants Program, the Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Program, or the Tobacco-Use Prevention Program, support service-learning as a strategy. Therefore, districts and schools should look for places to infuse service-learning in their already-existing plans.

Districts that have a 1994 *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* plan should strongly consider service-learning to address Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship. This goal calls for students to demonstrate “competency over challenging subject matter . . . so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation’s modern economy” (National Education Goals Panel 1995, 2).

California’s voluntary Challenge School District Reform Initiative also calls for “strong and meaningful partnerships among parents, other family members, school staff, businesses, and community members and agencies.” The rigorous high school graduation requirements adopted by Challenge

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994

Title I, Helping Disadvantaged Children Meet High Standards

Section 1114(b)(2)(C): The comprehensive plan [Local Improvement Plan] shall be, . . . (v) where appropriate, developed in coordination with programs under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, and the **National and Community Service Act of 1990.**

Demonstrations of Innovative Practices

Section 1502(a): Demonstration Programs to Improve Achievement.

(1) In general—From the funds appropriated for any fiscal year under section 1002(g)(2), the Secretary may make grants to . . . carry out demonstration projects that show the most promise of enabling children served under this title to meet challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards. Such projects shall include . . .

(F) programs that are built upon partnerships developed between elementary and middle schools, employers, and the community, which emphasize the integration of high quality academic and vocational learning, stress excellence and high expectations for success in academic subjects, instill responsibility, decision making, problem solving, interpersonal skills, and other competencies in students, and **make school relevant to the workplace and the community**, through applied and interactive teaching methodologies, team teaching strategies, **learning opportunities connecting school, the workplace, and the community**, and career exploration, awareness, and career guidance opportunities.

Title IV, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities

Section 4114(c): Authorized Activities—Grants and contracts under subsection (b) shall be used for . . . **(11) service-learning projects that encourage drug- and violence-free lifestyles.**

Note: The text set in bold shows the connection between the Improving America's School Act and service-learning.

districts include service-learning, which may be integrated into any course required for graduation.

Address the Risk-Management Issues

Local school boards and administrators must clarify the liability issues related to students going off-site for service-learning activities and to community partners coming onto the school site to prepare students for a service experience. Just as districts have policies for field trips, sports teams, extra-curricular activities, and visitors on campus, so too must there be policies for service-learning activities. As service-learning becomes increasingly a part of the school-community culture, well-developed guidelines will ensure the success of service activities and will break new ground for joint ventures between the school and community.

School district officials and community partners with their legal counsels must anticipate the issues that may arise when students are performing service in the community and must develop guidelines that best address the issues. Often a district's current insurance policy regarding off-campus activities covers community work and service-learning activities, but each district should clarify its insurance coverage.

Local school district policies regarding criminal background checks of adults who work with students and other security issues should be "service-learning friendly" without compromising safety. The adults who work with young people on service activities in the community must make every effort to ensure that students remain safe during the activities.

Assembly Bill (AB) 1610 and AB 1612 require all school district employees and contractors to be fingerprinted. Each district may extend this policy to require fingerprinting and background checks of school volunteers. School districts should have a clear policy on this issue.

Further Reading Related to This Recommendation

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